

Background Statement / On the proposed Chuitna Coal Mine

And the Native Village of Tyonek – IRA Council

Thank you for requesting information from the Native Village of Tyonek (NVT) – IRA Council. The NVT – IRA Council is a federally recognized Tribe and the peoples of Tyonek have thrived off the marine environment, rivers, and lands – while residing along the beaches of the Cook Inlet for thousands of years.

The Tyonek native peoples are referred to as the Tubughna, “Beach People”. We are located 45 air miles from Anchorage across the Cook Inlet in the village of Tyonek. The NVT relies on a subsistence lifestyle that is centuries old, and wild, healthy salmon are a vital component of NVT’s traditional way of life.

Pac Rim Coal, a Delaware corporation, funded by Texas multi-millionaires is actively seeking state and federal permits to operate the Chuitna coal strip mine – which would be Alaska’s largest coal strip mine on the western shores of Cook Inlet near the communities of Tyonek and Beluga. The Pac Rim proposal has been pushed by the Alaska State Department of Natural Resources with the goal of selling coal to Japan and China, which will contribute to Climate Change, pollute our waters, cover our fragile wetlands and waters with coal dust, destroy the Chuitna River Salmon habitat and result in Mercury travelling back to Alaska – further polluting our lands. Not surprising, a door-to-door poll of the 200 residents of the Native Village of Tyonek revealed that 98% of Villagers oppose the Chuitna coal mine. Nonetheless, government agencies continue to press forward with permitting the project. In response, the NVT has formally passed a resolution clearly stating our opposition.

Alaska stands on the front lines of rapid climate change, and from receding glaciers, warming salmon streams and eroding coastlines, the “Last Frontier” is feeling the disproportionate effects of global warming. Yet Alaska also possesses enormous undeveloped coal reserves, and despite the fact coal produces the most greenhouse gases of any traditional fossil fuel, state and federal agencies are actively working with outside corporations to mine and export Alaskan coal for energy-hungry Asian markets. While Alaska has experienced a host of proposed coal-related projects over the past six years, the Chuitna coal strip mine outside Anchorage poses the most imminent and substantial risks of any project in the state. If the Chuitna project moves forward, it will lock in the infrastructure and export markets that will open massive tidewater coal reserves for Asian markets clamoring for “cheap” and reliable energy.

Equally important, the Chuitna coal mine would be the first project in Alaskan history to mine completely through a wild salmon stream (the River supports all five species of Wild Pacific salmon). As a result, this development poses a dangerous precedent across the state, where growing pressures to mine coal, gold, and copper increasingly conflict with sustainable salmon resources. If the

Chuitna Coal Mine is permitted, the proposed Pebble Mine will surely gain significant ground, inevitably making it easier to also become permitted.

Currently NVT is working to gather the resources necessary to result in the denial of the permit application for the Chuitna Coal Strip Mine project, which would be the first strip mine in state history allowed to mine directly through 11 miles of salmon spawning and rearing habitat, completely removing the streambed from bank to bank to a depth of 350 feet! If permitted Avatar of Alaska would result.

We are confident that our status as a sovereign tribal government will be the key to stopping the permit from being approved within the next 9 – 12 months. Tyonek has a long, proud history standing up to corporate interlopers, having successfully fought back oil and gas interests prior to Alaska statehood. Now, Tyonek faces an even more serious threat: the complete destruction of the Chuitna River and the surrounding watershed which define the Tribe's identity, culture and way of life. The current project predicts a minimum 25 year mine life with a production rate of up to 12 million tons a year.

If the Chuitna mine is developed thousands of acres of wetlands will be drained, permanently degrading the headwaters of streams that flow into the Chuitna River. According to fisheries biologists and restoration experts the level of impact PacRim proposes will deemreclamation functionally impossible. Middle Creek, a tributary to the Chuit River (recognized as important to salmon by the Alaska Department of Fish and Game) will be destroyed and adjacent streams will have their water flows significantly altered. There is *NO* law in Alaska that bans the wholesale removal of a salmon stream; the decision is left to the discretion of state agency personnel. If the Chuitna coal strip mine is permitted a precedent will be set that has far reaching implications to all anadromous streams across the state – if they can mine through the Chuitna Watershed tributaries they can mine through any salmon stream on or adjacent to Native lands.

Tribal Governments throughout the United States and Alaska are uniquely and powerfully positioned to lead advocacy campaigns to stop unwise development. It is critical for the regulators to be aware of the special powers that Indigenous Governments possess, which have been reaffirmed by each President of the United States in the form of Executive Orders.

Please contact the Native Village of Tyonek for additional information at: (907) 583-2201 or contact the NVT Advisor / Rob Rosenfeld at: robrosey@gmail.com and/or (907)388-2683. Please send resolutions to: NVT P.O Box 82009, Tyonek, Alaska 99682 and to Rob Rosenfeld at: P.O. Box 13, Homer, Alaska 99603.